**Monday**Off

**Tuesday**

Objectives:

At the end of this lesson students will be able to

* Analyze Chaucer's characterization of the Wife of Bath
* Identify attitudes toward women and marriage in 14th-Century England
* Read an excerpt of Chaucer in Middle English
* Explain how the tale told by the Wife of Bath reflects on both her character and on Chaucer's view of marriage and women

Activity 1. Meet the Pilgrims

If your students are encountering *The Canterbury Tales* for the first time, explain to them the framing narrative of the poem (see links in Background section, above). Students may find it easier to understand the framing narrative of the poem once they realize that Chaucer's pilgrims are like any travelers on a "road trip" who have decided to tell stories to help pass the time. It might be helpful to make connections between *The Canterbury Tales* and several well known "road trip" films, such as *Stand By Me*, where the narrator, Gordie, is also a character in the film who is known for his talent for storytelling. *The Wizard of Oz* is another useful example because it depicts four characters who undertake a lengthy trek, each to seek aid from what they believe to be a mystical source.

Chaucer's pilgrims, of course, are on their own lengthy trek, this one a pilgrimage to seek spiritual aid from the shrine of Thomas Becket at Canterbury Cathedral. Explain the purpose and popularity of pilgrimages in Chaucer's time and make connections to modern pilgrimages where appropriate. The Geoffrey Chaucer Website available via EDSITEment has an brief explanation of [pilgrimages](http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/special/varia/pilgrimage/index.html" \t "_blank), and The Thomas Becket site, via the EDSITEment-reviewed Internet Medieval Sourcebook, provides a brief [biography of Thomas Becket](http://web.archive.org/web/20070205012854/http://www.loyno.edu/~letchie/becket/tour/default.htm" \t "_blank) and—particularly enjoyable for students—an [online tour of Canterbury Cathedral](http://web.archive.org/web/20080307223423/http://www.loyno.edu/~letchie/becket/tour/default.htm" \t "_blank).

You may click through the tour as you or some students read aloud the first eighteen lines of *The General Prologue*, which are among the most famous lines in English literature. Introduce students to the different sounds and stresses of Chaucer's Middle English. Reading Middle English is not all that difficult, and students can gain an appreciation for Chaucer's masterful use of rhyme and meter by reading his poetry aloud.

The PDF worksheet [Talk Like a Pilgrim: Reading Chaucer Aloud](http://edsitement.neh.gov/sites/edsitement.neh.gov/files/worksheets/Chaucer%27s%20Wife%20of%20Bath%20-%20Talk%20Like%20a%20Pilgrim%20-%20Reading%20Chaucer%20Aloud.pdf" \t "_blank) provides instructions and links (see the following paragraph). Furthermore, it contains the first 18 lines of the Prologue in Middle English, with a space below each line for the student to translate to the poem. Harvard's Geoffrey Chaucer Website on EDSITEment has a thorough guide for learning to speak Middle English (link also available for students on the lesson[LaunchPad](http://edsitement.neh.gov/launchpad-chaucers-wife-bath)), should time allow. If time is short, teachers might provide some basic guidance for students and then have them work individually or in groups as they work through understanding the first 18 lines.

[Talk Like a Pilgrim: Reading Chaucer Aloud](http://edsitement.neh.gov/sites/edsitement.neh.gov/files/worksheets/Chaucer%27s%20Wife%20of%20Bath%20-%20Talk%20Like%20a%20Pilgrim%20-%20Reading%20Chaucer%20Aloud.pdf" \t "_blank) (PDF)

**Instructions for students:** Read the introduction and first five lessons on the "Teach Yourself to Read Chaucer's Middle English" page at the EDSITEment-reviewed Geoffrey Chaucer Website. You should notice two important differences between speaking Middle English and the English we speak today. First, many of the vowel sounds in Middle English were pronounced differently; second, the final "e" in Middle English is often pronounced rather than silent. After reading these brief lessons, write out the phonetic pronunciation of each line and practice reading it aloud. The stresses on the syllables are indicated by bold font. Next, listen to the recording of the first 18 lines of The General Prologue, available from the Chaucer Metapage Audio Files via the Geoffrey Chaucer Website. How does your own pronunciation compare with the one you just heard?

Teach Yourself to Read Chaucer's Middle English

* [http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/teachslf/less-0.htm](http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/teachslf/less-0.htm" \t "_blank)

The General Prologue, Lines 1-18, ready by Tom Hanks (requires Real Player)

* [http://web.archive.org/web/20070630153508/http://academics.vmi.edu/english/audio/GP\_Hanks.html](http://web.archive.org/web/20070630153508/http://academics.vmi.edu/english/audio/GP_Hanks.html" \t "_blank)

Assessment: Formative-Teacher Observation

Homework: Finish Activity

**Wednesday**

Objectives :

At the end of this lesson students will be able to

* Analyze Chaucer's characterization of the Wife of Bath
* Identify attitudes toward women and marriage in 14th-Century England
* Read an excerpt of Chaucer in Middle English
* Explain how the tale told by the Wife of Bath reflects on both her character and on Chaucer's view of marriage and women

##### Activity 2. Meet Chaucer the Pilgrim and the Wife of Bath

Once students understand that The General Prologue briefly describes all the characters on pilgrimage to Canterbury Cathedral, they can begin dissecting the narrator's specific portrait of the Wife of Bath. Remind students that, like all the portraits in the "General Prologue," the description of the Wife of Bath reflects on the narrator that Chaucer created for his poem—sometimes called Chaucer the Pilgrim—as much as on the character of the Wife. Students need to understand that Chaucer the Poet actually wrote The Canterbury Tales, but Chaucer the Pilgrim tells them. Making himself a character in the Tales enables Chaucer to inject opinions without claiming they are his own, a tactic which enables much of the satire and irony in The Canterbury Tales.

Point out, for example, the narrator's opinion of the Wife's cloth-making ability (lines 446-447) and his estimate of her kerchiefs (lines 453-454). How does this tendency to exaggerate affect our impression of the narrator? Point out also his summary of her married life (lines 459-462). How should we interpret the narrator's suggestion here that quantity is a mark of quality, that the Wife's worth as a woman can be measured by the number of husbands she has had? Finally, note those lines that seem to imply that the Wife has had extramarital affairs as well (lines 461, 467, 476). Are these sly turns of phrase intended by the narrator, or does Chaucer seem at points like these to be having his narrator reveal more than he means to?

Have students offer a general impression of the Wife of Bath, based on her portrait in the "General Prologue." What can we infer about her personality, for example, from her domineering manner in church (lines 449-452), her world travels on pilgrimage (lines 463-467), and her social skills (lines 474-476). Note that Chaucer devotes many lines to her costume. Does she seem fashionable? over-dressed? Have students compare their mental image of the Wife of Bath with [the near-contemporary picture found in the Ellesmere Manuscript](http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/canttales/wbpro/" \t "_blank), accessible via the EDSITEment-reviewed Geoffrey Chaucer Website.

Conclude this close reading by asking students to summarize what the narrator seems to think of the Wife of Bath. Is she admirable? ridiculous? attractive? repulsive? Have students explore the notion that we see her in a dual perspective, both social and moral. How would one judge her by the standards of her society? How does she measure up to moral standards?

Assessment: Formative-Teacher Observation

Homework:

Wife of Bath Critical Questions

**Thursday**

Objectives :

At the end of this lesson students will be able to

* Analyze Chaucer's characterization of the Wife of Bath
* Identify attitudes toward women and marriage in 14th-Century England
* Read an excerpt of Chaucer in Middle English
* Explain how the tale told by the Wife of Bath reflects on both her character and on Chaucer's view of marriage and women

Activity 5. The Wife of Bath's Tale

Turn finally to the "Wife of Bath's Tale," which unexpectedly, perhaps, is not one of the bawdy stories for which Chaucer is famous but is instead an Arthurian romance based on a plot device familiar in fairy tales like "The Frog Prince"—the transformation of an ugly mate. The Geoffrey Chaucer website provides [background information for The Wife of Bath's Tale](http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/canttales/wbt/" \t "_blank).

After students have read the Wife's tale, consider first what might have led Chaucer to give her this story to tell. Explain that throughout *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer generally gives his pilgrims tales that fit their character. Thus the Knight, who is the noblest member of the group, recites a chivalric romance, while the Miller, who is one of the commoners, tells a bawdy tale. In other cases, Chaucer creates a dramatic motivation for his pilgrims' choice of tales, as when the Friar's insulting tale of a summoner prompts the Summoner to tell an insulting tale about a friar. The following questions may have guide discussion of the Wife of Bath's Tale:

* To what extent does the Wife's tale seem appropriate to her character as it has been depicted?
* Does the tale reveal new or unexpected aspects of her character? Does it illuminate any of the very different relationships that she has experienced in marriage?
* The moral of the story seems to confirm her argument in the "Prologue," that wives should have authority over their husbands, but the proof of the moral seems to come through magic. Are we to take the story at face value, or is it, in the truest sense, a "fairy tale"? How does this reflect on the Wife's character and opinions?
* Does Chaucer in this way represent the Wife as seeing herself as the "loathly lady" waiting for some loving husband to unlock the beauty inside her?

Students may notice that the hag of the story seems to sound like the Wife of Bath when she lectures her unwilling husband on "gentilesse" (lines [1106–1212](http://sites.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/teachslf/wbt-par.htm" \t "_blank)), the innate worthiness attributed to those of noble birth. Have students explore the hag's argument at this point: that true "gentilesse" is a quality of character, not a result of noble birth. Some or all of the following questions may help guide discussion:

* To what extent does this argument confirm the moral order of medieval life, which placed spiritual values above worldly ones?
* To what extent does it undermine the medieval belief in natural hierarchy, which saw a feudal pattern governing all things?
* Note that the hag's argument cannot change her loathly appearance. That occurs when her husband refuses the choice between inner truth and outer beauty by giving the governance in their marriage to her. In doing so, does he reject the concept of a natural hierarchy, which gives men authority over women, and place his faith instead in a spiritual order? Or does he "say the magic words" in the fairy tale tradition?

Assessment: Formative-Teacher Observation

Homework: Study

**Friday**

**Objectives:**

At the end of this lesson students will be able to

* Analyze Chaucer's characterization of the Wife of Bath
* Identify attitudes toward women and marriage in 14th-Century England
* Read an excerpt of Chaucer in Middle English
* Explain how the tale told by the Wife of Bath reflects on both her character and on Chaucer's view of marriage and women

Activity:

Wife of Bath Exam

Homework:

None

Assessment: Formative-Teacher Observation